

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 DHA-02 H-02 INR-07 /034 W

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R 270640Z SEP 75

FM USINT BAGHDAD

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2391

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 0998

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: CGEN (COHEN, HAIM)

SUBJ: ARREST OF GREEK CITIZEN HAIM COHEN

REF: STATE 216377; STATE 226398; BAGHDAD 0987

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1. SUMMARY: GREEK AMBASSADOR HAS BEEN TOLD BY MFA THAT HAIM COHEN (GREEK CITIZEN WITH RELATIVES IN US), IS ALIVE AND WILL BE RELEASED "IN A FEW DAYS". AMBASSADOR IS, HOWEVER, VERY CONCERNED ABOUT POSSIBLE MISTREATMENT OF COHEN. END SUMMARY.

2. I CALLED SEPTEMBER 23RD ON RECENTLY ARRIVED GREEK AMBASSADOR E.P. SCALIERES IN ORDER DISCUSS ARREST IN BASRA OF GREEK NATIONAL HAIM COHEN, AMBASSADOR HAD THICK FILE ON SUBJECT AND GAVE ME A LONG AND FRANK BRIEFING DURING FOURTY MINUTE MEETING. AMBASSADOR SAID HE HAD FIRST HEARD OF ARREST IN REPORT AUGUST 8TH FROM GREEK MFA WHICH QUOTED ATHENS NEWSPAPERS TO EFFECT THAT COHEN, NATIVE OF RHODES AND A RADIO OPERATOR, HAD BEEN TAKEN FROM HIS SHIP IN BASRA BY IRAQI SECURITY PERSONNEL. AMBASSADOR SAID THAT HE HAS IN INTERVAL, MADE THREE ORAL AND WRITTEN DEMARCHES TO IRAQI MFA, MOST RECENTLY ON SEPTEMBER 14, SEEING EITHER DIRECTOR GENERAL OR ACTING DIRECTOR GENERAL OF MFA CONSULAR SECTION EACH TIME. DURING SEPTEMBER 14 MEETING, DIRECTOR GENERAL TOLD AMBASSADOR THAT GREEK MFA HAD CALLED IN IRAQI AMBASSADOR IN ATHENS THREE TIMES TO DISCUSS MATTER. ON SECOND (AUGUST 14) AND THIRD OCCASIONS AMBASSADOR WAS ASSURED THAT COHEN WOULD BE RELEASED IN "A FEW MORE DAYS". HIS ALLEGED OFFENSE
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WAS HAVING ISRAELI VISA IN HIS GREEK PASSPORT. AMBASSADOR

SAID HE INTENDS FOURTH DEMARCHE BEFORE OCTOBER FIRST.

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3. BEGIN CONFIDENTIAL: AMBASSADOR SAID HIS GOVERNMENT HAS MADE IT UNMISTAKABLE CLEAR TO MFA THAT IT TAKES INCIDENT VERY SERIOUSLY. AMBASSADOR HAD IN LATEST (SEPTEMBER 14) MEETING AT FA DEMANDED THAT COHEN BE PRODUCED IN AMBASSADOR'S OFFICE WITHOUT FURTHER DELAY SO THAT HE COULD ARRANGE HIS RETURN TO GREECE. AMBASSADOR SAID DIRECTOR GENERAL OF CONSULAR AFFAIRS WAS EXTREMELY NERVOUS DURING LAST MEETING AND ADMITTED THAT MFA FOUND IT DIFFICULT TO MAKE HEADWAY WITH MINISTRY OF INTERIOR IN ABSENCE (AT UNGA MEETING IN NEW YORK) OF FOREIGN MINISTER HAMMADI. AMBASSADOR SAID THAT HE (AMBASSADOR) FEARED THAT HAIM GOHEN MIGHT HAVE BEEN MISTREATED BY BASRA SECURITY AUTHORITIES AND THAT THEY WERE RELUCTANT TO PRODUCE HIM UNTIL HE HAD RECOVERED FROM HIS INJURIES. HE SPECULATED THAT THIS MWOHT EXPLAIN DIRECTOR GENERAL'S NERVOUSNESS AND EVEN EMBARRASSMENT.

4. AMBASSADOR WAS TROUBLED THAT INCIDENT, UNLESS SPEEDILY AND AMICABLE RESOLVED, WOULD PUT STRAINS ON EMERGING IRAQI-GREEK RELATIONS WHICH HE WOULD BE SORRY TO SEE. LAMENTED ABSENCE OF A CONSULAR AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES.

5. COMMENT: IN VIEW OF VIGOR WITH WHICH GREEK GOVERNMENT APPEARS TO BE FOLLOWING THIS CASE, BELIEVE ANY FORMAL USINT OR USG APPROACH TO GOI IS COUNTERINDICATED AS IT MIGHT BE COUNTER-PRODUCTIVE. GREEK AMBASSADOR HAS PROMISED TO KEEP USINT INFORMED OF DEVELOPEMENTS. IN BRIEFING SENATOR JAVITS AND REPRESENTATIVE BIAGGI ABOUT CASE, DEPARTMENT SHOULD STRESS OBVIOUS DELICACY OF MATTER AND ENSURE THAT AMBASSADOR'S CONFIDENCES ARE NOT MADE PUBLIC.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: n/a
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 27 SEP 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: powellba2
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975BAGHDA00998
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750336-0462
From: BAGHDAD
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t1975099/aaaaahrg.tel
Line Count: 94
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 STATE 216377, 75 STATE 226398, 75 BAGHDAD 987
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: powellba2
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 23 JUN 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <04 JUN 2003 by CunninFX>; APPROVED <05 JUN 2003 by GolinoFR>; WITHDRAWN <21 Jun 2005 by BoyleJA, PRIVACY>; RELEASED <23 JUN 2005 by blochd0>; APPROVED <23 JUN 2005 by powellba2>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ARREST OF GREEK CITIZEN HAIM COHEN
TAGS: CGEN, (COHEN, HAIM)
To: STATE ATHENS
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006